WILDSTORM UNIVERSE

#7
Feb

Suggested
For Mature
Readers

sleeper™

season two

ED BRUBAKER
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Sean
2004

I always preferred night missions, back in the day. When I was with I.O. and in charge.

Something about what we did just felt better under cover of darkness.

It's easier to think of the bigger picture, the long distance goal your actions are working towards, when you're a shadow in the night.

In the light of day, I don't know if we'd have been able to live with ourselves, even though we were working for the good guys.

The sun beating down on dead bodies doesn't know about the future, doesn't see the big picture, it just knows where to send the flies.

This night mission, though, I'm NOT crazy about.

For one thing, I'm not in charge, Peter Grimm is.

He's the highest ranking Prodigal in Tao's organization, so he's always in charge if he's along.

But it's extremely rare for all three Prodigals to be sent on a single mission.

Something that I'm sure is on Miss Misery's mind, too. Though she hides it well.

The fourth member of this trip, though, is nothing but a bundle of nerves, as usual.

SO, ARE WE, UH, ARE WE ***ALMOST*** THERE, OR...UH...I MEAN, NEVERMIND...

...I JUST... AH...***HATE*** HELICOPTERS. ALWAYS HAVE.

'MEMBER THAT TIME ME AND YOU AN' GENOCIDE ***CRASHED*** THAT COPTER IN FRISCO, HOLDEN?

THAT WAS--I MEAN, I THOUGHT WE WERE--

HOW ABOUT SOME ***SILENCE***, AGENT TRIPLE-X RAY? AT LEAST UNTIL WE ARRIVE AT OUR DESTINATION?

SOME OF US ARE THINKING ABOUT ***TONIGHT'S*** JOB, AFTER ALL.

UH, YEAH... I MEAN, YES ***SIR.***

Nights like this remind me that with Tao, you never know if you're being TESTED.

And now that we're in the thick of his scheme against my old I.O. Commander, it's becoming harder and harder to figure out which way is up.

Pawns and Kings

This mission, though, I know for a FACT is taking their game up to a new level. And I told Tao as much yesterday...

LYNCH IS GOING TO BE FUCKING ***PISSED***, SERIOUSLY. ***ESPECIALLY*** IF I'M PART OF THIS.

HE THINKS I'M WORKING FOR ***HIM***, AND THIS IS--

I'M WELL AWARE OF WHAT COMMANDER LYNCH IS ***THINKING***, AGENT CARVER.

BUT HOW WILL IT LOOK TO HIM IF I DON'T ***RETALIATE*** FOR THE MOVES HE MAKES AGAINST ME?

AND IF I LEAVE ***YOU*** OUT OF THAT RETALIATION, IT'LL LOOK LIKE I'M ***SUSPICIOUS*** OF WHERE YOUR LOYALTIES LIE, WON'T IT?

OKAY, MAYBE, SURE...

BUT HE'LL BE EXPECTING SOME KIND OF ***WARNING*** FROM ME, AT LEAST.

I MEAN, YOU'RE RAISING THE STAKES A LOT WITH THIS ONE, IF YOUR INTEL IS CORRECT. AND I'D BE LIKELY TO TRY TO LEAK SOMETHING AHEAD OF TIME.

YOUR LINES OF COMMUNICATION WITH THE MAN ARE ***HARDLY*** STRONG AT THIS POINT.

IF HE QUESTIONS YOU ABOUT IT, YOU JUST DIDN'T HAVE TIME TO CONTACT HIM...

IT WAS A LAST MINUTE MISSION, AND YOU WERE ONLY INFORMED OF THE ***TARGET*** EN ROUTE.

AND BELIEVE ME, HOLDEN, MY INTEL ON THIS ONE IS GOOD. I'VE JUST BEEN WAITING FOR THE RIGHT ***TIME*** TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF IT.

AND REMOVING ONE OF LYNCH'S MOST VALUABLE ASSETS AT THIS ***EXACT*** TIME SEEMS LIKE ***JUST*** THE RIGHT MOVE TO ME.

IT WILL CERTAINLY KEEP HIM OFF-BALANCE AS WE TAKE THE NEXT STEPS.

I DON'T KNOW. I GUESS YOU'RE RIGHT, AREN'T YOU? BUT THEN YOU ***ALWAYS*** ARE.

THIS IS HOW THE GAME IS PLAYED. LYNCH EXPECTS ME TO HIT BACK, BUT I HIT HARDER THAN HE EXPECTS...

AND I TAKE SOMETHING OF ***HIS*** AND MAKE IT ***MINE.***

SOUND ***FAMILIAR?***

A LITTLE TOO MUCH, YEAH.

SO, YOU'VE KNOWN ABOUT THIS CODE-BREAKING FACILITY FOR ***HOW*** LONG?

A WHILE. I WOULD'VE TAKEN IT OUT SOONER, BUT THERE WAS NO POINT WHEN LYNCH WAS IN HIS COMA. AND IT'S NOT JUST THE FACILITY, IT'S THE MAN ***INSIDE*** IT.

MY SOURCES CLAIM HE CAN DECODE ***ANY*** MESSAGE IN THE SAME TIME IT TAKES TO WRITE IT DOWN.

SO HE'S MOST LIKELY EITHER ***ENHANCED,*** OR SOME KIND OF GENETIC ANOMALY, BUT JUST IMAGINE HOW USEFUL HE'LL BE, ONCE WE'VE TURNED HIM ***BACK*** ON THEM.

IF IT'S HOLDING A GUY ***THAT*** IMPORTANT, THIS PLACE HAS GOTTA BE ***FORTIFIED*** LIKE CRAZY.

IT IS, WHICH IS WHY I'M SENDING ALL OF MY BEST.

WHAT?

IT'LL BE ***ALL*** THE PRODIGALS, PLUS YOUR FRIEND WITH THE ***VISUAL*** ENHANCEMENTS. HE SHOULD COME IN QUITE HANDY THIS TIME OUT.

WAIT, YOU'RE SENDING ME OUT WITH ***PETER GRIMM?*** YOU FUCKING KNOW THAT--

I KNOW YOUR PROBLEMS WITH EACH OTHER. BUT I'M COUNTING ON MISS MISERY TO KEEP YOU BOTH IN LINE.

A JOB I'M SURE SHE'LL BE COMPLETELY ***ANNOYED WITH*** IF SHE ACTUALLY HAS TO DO IT.

SO, I'D BE ON MY ***BEST*** BEHAVIOR, IF I WERE ***EITHER*** OF YOU.

YOU AND PETER HATING EACH OTHER'S GUTS IS ***BAD ENOUGH.*** BUT WORKING A ***JOB*** WITH THAT ASSHOLE...

...IT'S LIKE WE'LL BE UNDER TAO'S ***MICROSCOPE*** THE WHOLE TIME.

I KNOW.

WELL, HE'S ***RIGHT***, I DON'T LIKE IT ONE FUCKING BIT, HOLDEN.

SO, WHAT DO WE ***DO*** ABOUT IT?

PLAY IT ***STRAIGHT.*** JUST LIKE WE WOULD ANY OTHER MISSION TAO GIVES US.

AND WHERE'S THE FUN IN ***THAT?***

YOU ***PROMISED*** ME WE'D BE FUCKING PEOPLE OVER, YOU BASTARD.

AND WE *WILL* BE... JUST NOT THIS TIME.

WE'RE JUST FIGURING THIS WHOLE MESS OUT, GRETCHEN...

WE CAN'T AFFORD TO RAISE TAO'S SUSPICIONS THIS EARLY.

FINE... WE PLAY IT *SAFE* THEN.

WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

WHERE DO YOU *THINK?*

IF I'M GOING TO HAVE TO PLAY THE GOOD LITTLE *SOLDIER* TOMORROW NIGHT, THEN I'M GETTING SOME *ACTION* IN TONIGHT.

I SAW SOME *BUMS* DOWN THIS ALLEY EARLIER..I FIGURE I'LL PISS ON THEM AND THEN LIGHT THEM ON FIRE.

OR MAYBE I'LL JUST KICK THEM TO DEATH, WHO KNOWS...

...YOU GOT A *PROBLEM* WITH THAT?

Missions like this--assault and infiltration jobs--are always best handled with a small number of highly-trained operatives.

Three people with the right skills are better than an army, because an army is never a surprise. They're EXPECTING an army.

They're NOT expecting us.

And since we've got a guy who can see through any and everything, we have an even BIGGER advantage...

--TWO MEN, ONE RIGHT BEHIND THE AIRLOCK DOOR, THE OTHER LEANING ON THE WALL.

BOTH LOOK TIRED.

HOW CONVENIENT.

YAAAUGH!

HOW ABOUT THE FLOOR **BELOW**, ANY MOVEMENT?

NOTHING I CAN **SEE**... IT GETS A LITTLE **BLURRY** TWO MORE DOWN, THOUGH, HARDER TO TELL WHO'S ON WHAT LEVEL.

THERE'S A LOT OF GUARDS, THOUGH, FURTHER DOWN IT GETS.

GOOD. WE WOULDN'T WANT IT TO BE **EASY**, WOULD WE?

UH, WHAT-EVER YOU SAY, MISS MISERY... JUST, AH, I'M NOT GOING DOWN ALL THE WAY WITH YOU, AM I?

OF **COURSE** YOU ARE, TRIPLE-X RAY... YOU'RE PART OF THE **TEAM** TONIGHT. THE INNER CIRCLE...

BESIDES, YOU'RE THE CLOSEST THING TO A **MAP** OF THIS PLACE WE'VE GOT.

UH, UH-- BUT, I'M NOT REALLY...I MEAN, ***COMBAT*** MISSIONS AREN'T MY--

DON'T WORRY, RAY, I'LL TAKE CARE OF YOU.

JUST KEEP YOUR HEAD DOWN WHEN IT GETS REALLY UGLY.

The thing is, on a job like this, at some point the shit is simply going to hit the fan.

This is a sneak attack on a secure government facility. This isn't a place you can slip in and out of, not for what we're after, at least.

So no matter how good we are, before we get to our objective, the alarm is going to go off. It's just a fact.

And then we're going to have a hell of a lot of I.O. Special Assault Squad guards up our asses.

The idea is to just get as far in as you can before that alarm.

And to keep the exit clear behind you.

It's almost pathetic how good we are at this.

But Ray is not...like he always says, he's a lover, not a fighter.

I SAID KEEP YOUR HEAD **DOWN,** RAY!

AH! JESUS! JESUS FUCKING CHRIST!

GET HIM TO THAT **WALL,** CARVER! WE NEED TO FIND THAT **CODE-BREAKER!**

NOW!

SHIT! SHIT!

FOCUS, RAY... WHAT DO YOU **SEE?**

I DON'T-- I DON'T **KNOW!** THERE'S SOME KIND OF **TECH ROOM** DOWN THAT WAY, PAST A LOT OF **GUARDS!**

SHIT! I DON'T **KNOW,** HOLDEN!

I THINK THERE'S SOMEONE **IN THERE,** MAYBE...CONNECTED TO A BUNCH OF **MACHINES** OR SOMETHING...

THAT'S **GOTTA** BE HIM...

KEEP AN EYE ON *RAY!* I'LL GO GET THE *TARGET!*

RIGHT!

CAREFUL WITH HIM, CARVER. TAO WANTS THAT MAN *ALIVE.*

YEAH, I WAS AT THE OPS MEETING, *TOO,* ASSHOLE.

So here I am, killing men I used to be on the same side as, like it's nothing.

I guess I've killed so many on BOTH sides now that none of it even fazes me.

All I'm worried about is what Lynch is going to say when he finds out I was here.

Worried that it's going to fuck up everything, now that I've brought Miss Misery into my secret agenda.

Fuck it, though, it's all one big roll of the dice anyway, isn't it?

I'll just tell Lynch he should've hidden this guy better, if he's so valuable...

...And then I see something that DOES faze me. Something that, if it could, would most likely make me sick...

...JESUS...

I'M, UH, HERE TO GET YOU *OUT*...

ARE YOU-- JESUS FUCKING CHRIST...

CAN YOU *TALK?*

K-K-K-KAHHH--

N-N-N-NAHH--

THIS is what those bastards're fighting over, a little fucking kid...

A terrified little kid who Lynch and his people have been using for who knows how long...

...And I'm just supposed to hand him over to Tao?

P-P-PLEASE... J-J-J-JUST

--K-K-KILL M-ME...

I'M SO SORRY...

WHAT THE FUCK, CARVER? WHERE IS HE?

JUST *GO!* I'LL EXPLAIN WHEN WE'RE *CLEAR!*

HOLDEN?

MOVE! GET US IN THE FUCKING AIR, *NOW!*

WHAT THE HELL *HAPPENED*, CARVER? WHERE IS OUR *ACQUISITION?*

HE'S FUCKING *DEAD*, ALL RIGHT?

HE WAS SOME KIND OF FUCKING ***MUTATION*** OR SOMETHING, AND WHEN I TRIED TO DISCONNECT HIM FROM HIS MACHINES, HE ***DIED...***

WELL, THIS IS ***JUST*** GREAT. TAO IS GOING TO HAVE YOUR BALLS FOR BREAKFAST OVER THIS, CARVER. YOU ***BLEW*** THE WHOLE MISSION.

YOU KNOW WHAT? ***FUCK YOU.*** LET HIM COME DOWN ON ME...I DON'T EVEN ***CARE*** RIGHT NOW.

WELL, I GUESS THERE'S JUST ONE LAST THING TO DO...AT LEAST ***ONE*** OF US WILL ACHIEVE THEIR OBJECTIVE TONIGHT. ***RIGHT,*** RAYMOND?

WHAT? WHAT'RE YOU TALKIN--

BLAM

NOOOO!

HOLDEN, STOP! HE'S GONE!

WHAT THE FUCK--WHAT THE FUCK'VE YOU DONE, YOU SON OF A BITCH?

STAND DOWN, AGENT. THIS WAS ON TAO'S ORDERS.

THE LITTLE PRICK WAS A MOLE FOR YOUR OLD BOSS.

HE WAS--
HE--

GOD FUCKING DAMN IT!

I AM GOING TO FUCKING *KILL YOU.*

I SWEAR TO WHATEVER GOD SHAT YOU INTO EXISTENCE...

I'LL BE LOOKING FORWARD TO IT.

DON'T TAKE THAT *TONE* WITH ME, AGENT. MAYBE YOU FORGET WHO'S *RUNNING* THINGS AROUND HERE?

RAY WAS AN *INNOCENT BYSTANDER*, GOD DAMN IT!

HE WAS TOTALLY *HARMLESS.*

I'M AFRAID I DON'T SEE WHERE ALL THIS HOSTILITY IS *COMING* FROM...YOU *KNOW* WHAT THIS IS ABOUT, HOLDEN.

HOW WOULD IT LOOK TO THE OLD MAN IF I LET TRIPLE-X RAY RUN AROUND INSIDE MY ORGANIZATION AFTER HE WAS SO *COMPROMISED?*

I DON'T *GIVE A SHIT!*

HE WAS MY *FRIEND*, YOU SICK FUCK!

WHEN HAVE I *EVER* GIVEN THE IMPRESSION THAT ANY OF YOU WEREN'T *DISPOSABLE?*

YOU HAVE VALUE TO ME, HOLDEN, BECAUSE OF OUR MUTUAL CONNECTION WITH LYNCH...AND I ENJOY YOUR COMPANY, HONESTLY.

BUT NEVER FORGET WHOSE *AGENDA* YOU'RE WORKING FOR.

I WILL DO WHATEVER I MUST TO ENSURE THE SUCCESS OF MY GOALS...

...AND I WILL DO ***WHATEVER*** IT TAKES TO KEEP MY PEOPLE IN LINE. NO SACRIFICE IS TOO GREAT.

AFTER ALL, WE CAN'T LIVE ON ***TRUST*** IN OUR WORLD.

YOU SON OF A BITCH.

I THINK WE UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER...

...DON'T WE?

Brubaker*Phillips*Strachan*Fletcher*Quinn*Dunbier